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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

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ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

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ROBERT S. RANGEL, STAFF DIRECTOR

Dear Democratic Colleague:

The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round is underway. Many in our caucus support the upcoming BRAC round; many others oppose it or would prefer a postponement. It is important that our Members vigorously represent their bases no matter their position on this BRAC round, or whether they have been through previous BRAC rounds or not.

At the request of Leader Nancy Pelosi, I have compiled a BRAC "To Do" list. The four keys to vigorously representing your bases are to:

- Learn the BRAC process;
- Know your bases;
- Communicate with the Pentagon; and
- Communicate with the entire base community.

Attached is a longer document that goes into greater detail on each of these points. The term "base" is used throughout the attachment, but the advice is applicable to any DoD installation you may represent – bases, laboratories, education centers, hospitals or clinics, industrial facilities, or other military installations. Following these suggestions is no guarantee that your base will not be closed or suffer job losses, but can help ensure that your base is well represented by you throughout the BRAC process.

These suggestions are focused primarily on things to do in the next year. How to approach the BRAC Commission (which will not be nominated until March 2005) or what to do if a base you represent is slated for closure is discussed only briefly. As the BRAC process moves forward, these could be future topics of similar "Dear Colleagues."

Finally, please remember that while the BRAC process surely poses risks for many communities, it also presents opportunities for growth at many bases as DoD adjusts missions and realigns assets. Vigorous representation can only help your base in these instances as well.

Sincerely,



Ike Skelton
Ranking Democrat

A BRAC “To Do” List

I. Learn the BRAC Process.

- ***Learn the BRAC timeline and the changes in this BRAC round compared to previous ones.*** A previous “Dear Colleague” dated January 20 was sent to each of your offices that contained a BRAC timeline and two attachments that compare the 2005 BRAC round process and criteria to past rounds. If you cannot locate your copy, be sure to contact the Democratic staff on the House Armed Services Committee, x54158, to obtain another copy.
- ***Make sure your Washington, D.C. and district staffs are knowledgeable about the process.*** Your staffs here and in your district represent you. Be sure they are knowledgeable about the BRAC process. Your staff should become familiar with the DoD BRAC website because it can help answer many of the basic questions your constituents may have about BRAC: www.dod.mil/brac/. In addition, Ms. Esther Schwartz of the Office of the Secretary of Defense/Legislative Liaison, (703) 695-1436, is currently fielding all congressional BRAC inquiries that you or your staff may have.
- ***Know how your base fared in the last BRAC round.*** The congressional liaison office for each of the services can provide you with information on how your base was evaluated in the last BRAC round. Bases are likely to be evaluated differently this round, given the new requirements of the Global War on Terrorism abroad, the renewed emphasis on homeland security missions, and the ongoing effort to promote jointness between the services. However, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your bases in the last round will undoubtedly prove useful to you.

II. Know your Bases.

- ***Know the missions of your base.*** Many bases now host more than one service, and even have non-DoD entities on the base. Be sure you and your staff understand all the tenants and their missions that are on your base in order to effectively communicate the importance of your base both to the Pentagon and your local community. If you do not know this, either your base commander or the congressional liaison offices of each service can assist you.
- ***Become familiar with the base, its leadership, and the surrounding area.*** If you have not done so already, or it has been some time since you last did so, set aside at least half a day and request a thorough tour of your base. Establish a working relationship with the base leadership, and ask the base commander or other appropriate base official to candidly discuss the ability of the base to support its mission requirements, the condition of its facilities, the level of support provided by the local community, and any issues the base may be having with the local community (such as complaints about noise or environmental concerns). In particular, public,

commercial, or residential buildings that are encroaching upon the border of the bases can concern a base commander and affect the BRAC evaluation. For example, in the 1995 round, a base initially received a poor evaluation because local officials planned to build a school in the runway approach path. It is important that your staff, and in particular your district staff, have a working relationship with the base leadership and be knowledgeable about the base and any issues with the local community.

- ***If possible, address any outstanding issues between the base and the local community.*** In past rounds, some community groups publicly advocated closing their local base because they were unable to resolve issues with the base. Members can often serve as a useful go-between to resolve minor problems between a community and a base, thus preventing a mixed message about the support of the local community for the base. This requires not only having a candid relationship with base officials, but making sure you have a good relationship with local officials and community leaders.
- ***Know the growth potential of your bases.*** While it is natural to think of simply defending your bases against closure, BRAC is also an opportunity to attract new missions to your bases. Be sure to have a candid discussion with base officials about the capacity of the base to accept new tenants and new missions on the base.
- ***Understand the unique characteristics of your bases.*** The BRAC evaluation process favors installations with irreplaceable assets – open ranges for tanks, unimpeded airspace and approaches for aircraft, deep-water harbors for ships. Being able to identify what truly cannot be reproduced or replaced will help you be a more effective advocate for your base.
- ***Be careful with the term “BRAC.”*** Due to the sensitivity of formulating the BRAC list, the Pentagon has issued strict guidance to all bases that limits their ability to discuss the 2005 BRAC round. As you deal with the base leadership and learn more about your bases, make your requests without invoking the term “BRAC.” This will allow your contacts on the base and in the military to be as open and candid as possible.
- ***Be realistic about military construction (MILCON) adds.*** Every year, the congressional defense committees are swamped with requests to authorize a military construction item for a base not contained in the President’s request, but only a fraction of these requests can be accommodated. DoD officials have already decided that that milcon adds to the FY 2005 budget will not make a difference one way or another in the BRAC process – they will be outside the evaluation process. Do not overstate the importance of milcon adds to your community, and do not focus solely on obtaining a milcon project at the expense of taking other steps to promote your base in the BRAC process.

III. Communicate with the Pentagon.

- ***Meet with the Pentagon officials that have authority over your base.*** Every service has an Assistant Secretary for Installations and Environment. Arrange to have a meeting with this official, preferably accompanied with appropriate state and local officials from your base. Use this meeting to stress the support the community has for the base at the federal, state, and local level, and ask them for any advice they may offer to improve the base in any way. In addition, meet with other relevant Pentagon officials and have a similar discussion. For example, if you have a reserve base or a service laboratory, meet with the reserve command or the head of research for that service. The congressional liaison office of each service can assist you in identifying such officials.
- ***Meet with other services if appropriate.*** If you believe your base has room for growth and is suited to perform missions for another service, be sure to also meet with the Assistant Secretary for Installations and Environment and other appropriate officials for that service. For example, if you have an Air Force base with room for extra hangars, discuss the possibility of adding Army helicopter units with the Army.
- ***Get to know your congressional liaisons.*** Many of the suggestions already raised will require you and your staff to work with the congressional liaisons for each service. The services pride themselves on their strong congressional liaison offices, and each service has a designated liaison to handle BRAC issues. They offer you a viewpoint that can only be gained from actual military service, and can provide you valuable advice.

IV. Communicate with the Entire Base Community.

- ***Consider leading a state-wide approach to BRAC.*** Some states have already formed state-wide BRAC committees which coordinate the state's communications with the Pentagon (and later the BRAC Commission) to ensure that conflicting or erroneous information about the state's bases are not provided. Some BRAC committees are led by an office within the state government, others are led by one of the congressional representatives. Learn whether your state already has a BRAC committee, and if not, consider whether one makes sense. If so, consider taking a leading role in either organizing and/or leading it in the very near future. If a state-wide BRAC committee is not feasible, consider one that focuses on your district or a single base.
- ***Consider leading a congressional approach with other Member offices.*** A coalition with other House offices and with the Senators from the state representing the base could be very effective in communications with the Pentagon (and later the BRAC Commission) to ensure that conflicting or erroneous information about the state's bases are not provided. This congressional coalition could complement any state and/or local committees that represent bases in your state and/or district.

- ***Meet regularly with your local leaders.*** Meet with the local leaders (such as elected officials and the Chamber of Commerce) of the communities surrounding the base on a regular basis. Having the base commander attend these meetings would also be helpful. This forum could be used to update the community on any BRAC-related legislation, what efforts you and your staff have made on the behalf of them and the base, and to solicit advice and ideas from the local leaders and the base leadership.
- ***Understand the role of consultants.*** It is highly doubtful that any consultant or lobbyist is able to prevent the Pentagon from putting a base on the closure list or to persuade the BRAC Commission from taking a base off the Pentagon's list. However, a consultant may be useful in honing the message of the communities' support for the base to the Pentagon or BRAC Commission, or identifying new missions for your base. A consultant may also be useful in reviewing the data about the base once the Pentagon releases it to make sure it is accurate, and if there are errors, communicating that to the BRAC Commission. The use of consultants is ultimately up to the communities. However, if one is retained, you and your office should always be aware of their role and what they are communicating because the Pentagon and/or BRAC Commission will consider the consultant as speaking for your community. Also, be sure your community is fully aware of what other bases and communities the consultant's firm represents in order to avoid conflicts of interest.
- ***Take a positive approach.*** Most communities fear the BRAC process, and that attitude often translates into a negative approach to the BRAC commission. By contrast, our former colleague Sonny Montgomery arranged parades for the BRAC commissioners when they came to visit facilities in his district, allowing the community to line the streets to show their support for their base in a very tangible manner. While that approach may be more dramatic than your communities are comfortable with, the record suggests that communities that approach the process with a positive mindset tend to be able to better demonstrate support for their base.
- ***Be proactive in approaching your community.*** While the internal deliberations of the Pentagon in forming the BRAC list may be very secretive, there is no reason for a Member to keep a low profile. It helps the morale of the community to know that their elected Member is vigorously representing the base and monitoring the BRAC process. Issue a press release whenever you meet with the Pentagon, visit the base, or host a meeting with community leaders. Once you have an established track record of representing the base, consider writing an op-ed explaining what you have done, and if appropriate, what further steps you plan to take.
- ***Do not ignore the worst case.*** Work with your local economic development agencies to understand their contingency plans in case a base you represent is closed or suffers a major realignment. You will have to exercise careful judgment to ensure that such preparation is not indicative

of “throwing in the towel” on your base, but prudence warrants being prepared for a closure. Bear in mind that many communities that have experienced a closure have rebounded with a stronger, more diversified economy over time.